# ACCESSIBLE NEWS N° 40

## Aroga Announces Some Beginnings and an End

Aroga (**www.aroga.com**), the Vancouver-based company dealing in low vision, blindness, communication, physical access and education products for people with disabilities has announced a couple of new partnerships and a parting of the ways.

In May, the company announced a partnership with Bones, a leading Swiss manufacturer of digital talking book players and adaptive aids for distribution of Bones' product portfolio including the Milestone 312. The Milestone 312 is a device about the size of a credit card that provides people with a vision loss with a voice recorder, using an internal or external microphone; a DAISY talking book player that reads text documents in such formats as TXT, Audible.com and DAISY 3.0 (NLS, Bookshare); a music and text to speech player that supports MP3, AAC, WMA, WAV, DAISY 2.02 and AA/AAX (Audible); an AM/FM radio; and a clock and alarm.

Aroga has also announced a partnership with Tutorwiz. The primary purpose is to combine forces to provide high level assistive technology expertise, education and support for educators.

The parting of the ways comes with the end of Aroga's distribution partnership with Freedom Scientific. Dating back over 20 years, Aroga was one of the first dealers for the original trio of companies which were purchased to form Freedom Scientific in April, 2000. Aroga was instrumental in the Canadian introduction of JAWS for DOS and the first version of JAWS for Windows, produced by Henter Joyce; Openbook, the original OCR product for the visually impaired, introduced by Arkenstone; and such Blazie Engineering products and the Braille N Speak, which revolutionized electronic note taking for the blind.

In a statement to the company's customers, Aroga's President, Bob Vigerut, said "We remain very proud to have been a part of the historical achievements of these pioneers of Assistive Technology....The core strength of those three pioneering companies was innovation. Our core strength as a company has been to seek out innovators from around the world and bring their products to Canada. We are determined that our philosophy remains unchanged. We will continue to seek out products that we feel represent the best combination of quality, innovation and value.

While the company will no longer be a distributor of Freedom Scientific products, Aroga pledges to provide lifetime support and repair capabilities on any Freedom Scientific product purchased from them. "We will not desert the thousands of

Canadians who have trusted us with their purchase of JAWS and other Freedom products over the past 20 years", Mr. Vigerut said.

**Profile: Sage Solutions for Independent Living Inc.**

An Ottawa company that specializes in accessibility renovations counts Canadian military families among its customers. Robert Howlett is the President of Sage Solutions for Independent Living Inc. (**www.sagesolutions.ca**) and a passionate advocate of renovating commercial and residential properties to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

In the past three years, the company has carried out home renovations for members of the Canadian Forces who have acquired disabilities as a result of being injured in the line of duty. Sage Solutions also manages an increasing number of accessibility renovations for people whose abilities are changing but who want to remain living in their own homes. With one in seven Canadians currently aged 65 years or over, that proportion of the population is expected to double by 2031. Older adults are a market with a lot of growth potential.

Accessible News recently spoke to Sage Solutions's Robert Howlett about his company and about making homes usable by their occupants. Here's what he had to tell us:

Accessible News (AN): How long has your company been in business?

SAGE: The company was incorporated in July 2002. We have two sources of revenue:

1- We're a North American distributor of accessibility products, mainly bathroom safety-related products.

2- We also provide residential installation services and commercial fit ups for barrier free access.

AN: How did you get into doing renovations for Forces personnel?

SAGE: We were first contacted by DND in 2007 to help them prepare for a returning soldier from Afghanistan who was injured by an IED (Improvised Explosive Device). We were asked to advise on the suitability of modifying a PMQ (Private Married Quarters). Ultimately the soldier chose to live off base as the PMQ would not have been suitable for his growing family needs. Since then, we've been involved in a number of projects for military families, many of which include elevator installations, bathroom modifications and improved access to and from the home.

AN: Are you seeing an increase in these types of renovations?

SAGE: Absolutely. Although there are lots of companies that can do the work, few have the knowledge or interest in accessibility modifications and even fewer have people with the communication skills needed to liaise with the client care team that may include occupational therapists, case managers and military service managers. This is our niche, excellent quality workmanship and project management.

AN: You're an Ottawa-based company. How far outside of Ottawa will you take on jobs?

SAGE: Right now we can manage projects throughout the greater Toronto and Ottawa regions. Halifax and the Maritime region will follow.

AN: What are the main concerns that homeowners have in planning an accessible renovation?

SAGE: A big problem is that most residential housing is not designed and built to be accessible or easily modified. So, when a client's mobility needs change, the degree of modification and subsequent costs can be quite considerable. This is compounded by the fact that the decision to renovate for accessibility is a reactive one and made mostly during the course of a person's accident or disease process. Very often families are dealing with a great deal of stress over and above what they need to consider for an accessibility renovation. So to answer the question, I think that homeowners need to keep accessibility in mind when purchasing or renovating a property because accessibility is eventually going to be an issue for someone living in or visiting that house.

About ten years ago, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) did a lot of work on "Flex Housing", a concept where new home builders would design and build homes that could be easily modified for accessibility, but it was an idea that was probably a bit ahead of its time. Even now, housing that is supposed to be designed for "adult living" is not always accessible. In some cases, all "adult living" means is that there are no children in the building.

AN: Is it a lot more expensive to do an accessible renovation than just a regular reno?

SAGE: A regular renovation may focus on one room or area of a house, like a kitchen or bathroom. Renovations for accessibility can include access to and from the house (landscaping), access through the house (hallways, stairs and basements) and bathrooms that most often need to be modified for safety and access. So for the most part, an accessibility renovation is usually more comprehensive.

AN: Are there federal or provincial programs to help people pay for the cost?

SAGE: The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) have a number of programs available to assist with the costs of home modifications. However eligibility is usually income dependent. Home modifications for accessibility can also be claimed as a tax credit. Speak with your accountant for more information.

In our opinion, there needs to be more education and financial incentives for middle-income earners to age in place. Aging in place can help to reduce health care costs by decreasing the need for provincial long term care facilities and improving the efficacy of community delivered healthcare programs. But you have to have housing that's accessible and safe to live in. I expect that as more Canadians reach the age of 65, critical mass will eventually drive the government to take home modification a bit more seriously.

There are federal and provincial subsidy programs available, but they are generally income dependent. For more information on these programs, you're best to contact Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation (**www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca**) for more information.

From a military perspective, the Department of National Defence has been very proactive in sourcing funding to assist injured and disabled military personnel with their accessible housing needs.

AN: If I want to have an accessible renovation done and I don't live in the Ottawa area, is there an organization I can go to find companies that do this kind of work? If not, what would I look for in the Yellow Pages?

SAGE: Great question. The problem here is that the terms of reference for this segment of the renovation sector have yet to be defined. You may be able to find information under headings like Home Modifications/Accessibility Renovations/Universal Design. I would suggest that that anyone can give us a call at 1-866-255-2228 and we'll see if we have any info.

**Media Access Canada Plans Renewal 2010 Conference and Seeks Input on the Digital Economy Strategy**

Media Access Canada, MAC., has announced it will host a two-day conference called Renewal 2010, in October or early November. The conference will focus on such key issues in Canadian accessible content as policy, compliance measurement, broadcast licence renewals in the coming year, fall-out from the closing of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, accessible web content and new technology

developments, description and captioning standards for multiple platforms. The latest research from the academic world will also be showcased.

Beverley Milligan, President and CEO of Mediac Inc, the consulting firm working with MAC stated "there is a need to better understand relevant policy and regulatory issues that will impact accessible content over the next seven years." Further, she noted "it is time to work with experts in engineering, production, legislation and education to fully understand the difference between real and mythical barriers for the provision of accessible content. To do this, we need to hear from broadcasters, the CRTC and Cultural industry groups and work together as a community of accessible content users, to take a position for the long and short term. Working together to better understand the issues will ensure accessible content, regardless of how it is distributed, will be available to all Canadians."

MAC is a not-for-profit organization with a mandate to achieve a 100% accessible content day for Canadians, regardless of the distribution method. To do this, MAC works with people and organizations who benefit from accessible content, as well as government, broadcast, telecommunication and internet industry sectors to fully understand the issues involved in financing, creating, distributing, and receiving accessible content. Look for more information on MAC and Renewal 2010 at: **www.mediac.ca/MAC**.

MAC is also looking for your thoughts for an accessible digital strategy. On 10 May, 2010, the Government of Canada launched a national consultation with Canadians to develop a national digital economy strategy for Canada. The consultations close on July 9, 2010, and are hosted on-line at **www.digitaleconomy.gc.ca** . Areas which the government is most interested in are those concerning the capacity to innovate using digital technologies. They have broken down the key areas as:

Building a World-Class Digital Infrastructure;

Growing the Information and Communications Technology Industry;

Digital Media;

Creating Canada's Digital Content Advantage; and

Building Digital Skills for Tomorrow.

Accessibility for Canadians with disabilities and anyone else who requires alternative methods for using content will be affected by the results of this consultation, so MAC is preparing a submission on behalf of all people and organizations who need accessible content.

Mediac's Beverley Milligan is also working with MAC on this submission. She noted that at a minimum, any new legislation or policy must harmonize with international standards for accessibility. Further, an accessibility lens for compliance around communication and procurement is essential. For this reason, she stressed, "it is important that a Digital Economic Strategy Accessibility Working Group be appointed to contribute to the body of work that will ultimately be published."

If you have a thought or opinion regarding Canada's digital economy strategy, please send them to **MediaAccessCanada@yahoo.ca** who will ensure they are included in the submission which will be posted at **www.mediac.ca/MAC** upon completion. Remember, the consultations close on Friday, July 9, so send your comments to MAC before that date.

**Kinova: reaching out**

Kinova (**www.kinovarehab.com**) was founded in 2006 by Charles Deguire and Louis-Joseph Caron L'Écuyer, two passionate, inspiring and visionary young engineers. Located in the heart of Montreal, Kinova develops, manufactures and markets robotic products specifically intended for people with various physical disabilities.

Charles Deguire, got the "invention bug" at an early age when supporting and assisting three of his uncles who had muscular dystrophy. One of them, Jacques Forest, had already devised an ingenious makeshift arm that could pick up all kinds of objects. Motivated and inspired by his inventive uncle, who passed away in 1993, Charles took up his robotic arm idea and elaborated on it. Thus was born JACO.

Launched in 2009, JACO is a six-axis robotic manipulator arm with a three-fingered hand. This little marvel of engineering significantly improves the lives of persons with reduced mobility. Lightweight, very quiet, unobtrusive, safe and even weatherproof, JACO assists anyone with an upper body mobility impairment to perform complex actions. Many everyday activities, such as picking up glasses, holding a fork or opening a door, which most people do without thinking, can become insurmountable for people who have a disability and have to ask someone else to do it for them. The JACO arm makes life easier for these people by giving them greater freedom and independence.

Building on its success, Kinova intends to pursue and further its research and development of products, like JACO, designed to make life easier for persons with mobility limitations.

Quick to be noticed for its exceptional qualities, Kinova's innovation soon garnered awards and bursaries. Among them, first prize in the Quebec Entrepreneurship

Contest, technological and technical category – local level, as well as the award for most innovative project in the BDC Enterprize competition in Vancouver last year.

Building on its success, Kinova intends to pursue and further its research and development of products, like JACO, designed to make life easier for persons with mobility limitations. Concurrently, it has made it a priority to commercialize its latest invention on global markets so that as many users as possible can enjoy the freedom JACO can afford them. The contribution from Canada Economic Development will enable the young firm to work on achieving both of these goals. As a result, more and more people around the world will be able to accept and benefit from the helping hand extended to them through the expertise, dynamism and creative genius of Kinova.

**New Products or Services**

Since the last issue of Accessible News, a number of Canadian companies have announced the launch of new products, new versions of existing products or launched new Web sites. Here's a brief summary. The companies have been presented in alphabetical order.

In May, HumanWare **(www.humanware.com)** marked the 10th anniversary of the BrailleNote by launching a new 18-cell version of the ultra-thin, ultra-light BrailleNote Apex, a powerful note taker designed for students and professionals who are blind. HumanWare has also announced a Version 3.2 Stream free software upgrade with support for Russian, Belgian Dutch and Brazilian Portuguese languages and a new version 3.2 of the Companion Software that is compatible with both the Stream and ClassMate. This newly updated free software now provides a backup and restores SD card features. Other new features include transfer of DOC and PDF files and Companion now converts MS Word DOC files to HTML and PDF to text files so you can access them on your Stream. Stream currently supports 14 languages with more to come. In addition to new languages and general maintenance, HumanWare now has the underlying framework to support their long anticipated SoftPak. The Stream SoftPak is optional software that provides five features: support of the EPUB book format, ability to play Audible's Enhanced Audio books, playback of MP4 audio including iTunes, Support for MS Word DOCX and ability to record in MP3 or Wav file formats.

Smart Move Training & Development Inc. **(www.smartmovetraining.ca)** offers organizations training and on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and AODA compliance assessments. Public sector, private and not-for-profit organizations in Ontario can visit Smart Move's web site or call 519-599-2785 for details.

**News Bits**

In April, Edmonton's Madentec Ltd. (**www.madentec.com**) announced that is has partnered with the US company, AbleNet, which will be the master distributor and exclusive manufacturer for all of Madentec's assistive technology products. Madentec will continue to own these products and will provide ongoing development support, but all other facets of product delivery will be administered by AbleNet. The two companies have complimentary product lines, but AbleNet's global sales and marketing penetration far outreaches that of Madentec. For more information, visit Madentec's web site or visit AbleNet at **www.ablenetinc.com** .

On April 30, the Province of Ontario announced the launch of a new Life Sciences Commercialization Strategy that combines existing and new life sciences initiatives into a comprehensive and coordinated plan. The Strategy will help position Ontario as one of the world's leading life sciences jurisdictions. As part of the Strategy, Ontario is investing more than $21 million over five years in the Health Technology Exchange (HTX: **www.htx.ca**) which will help HTX partner with innovative companies, research institutions and health providers to develop cutting-edge medical and assistive technologies (MAT) that can be marketed to the world. The global market for MAT is estimated at $250 billion. An estimated 700 Ontario-based MAT companies employ more than 22,000 and generate approximately $4 billion in revenues.

The Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA: **www.otc-cta.gc.ca**) has reissued a code of practice and released some of its information in the DAISY format. "Take Charge of your Travel: A Guide for Persons with Disabilities", "Reservation Checklist for Persons With Disabilities: A Step-by-step Guide for Planning Your Travel" and "Code of Practice : Aircraft Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities" can now be downloaded from the CTA web site in DAISY 4.0. The "Code of Practice" now also includes the Agency's two implementation guides: "Space for Service Dogs Onboard Large Aircraft" and "Tactile Row Markers Onboard Large Aircraft". Visit the CTA web site for these publications or to request other material.

CNIB accessibility consultants can provide you with the tools and information you need to make your business more inclusive. They can assist you in the design, redesign or audit of your website, to reach a wider audience, convert your documents into an accessible format that works with adaptive technologies, review your new or current desktop applications and provide your service or support desk staff with accessibility tools and training. They can also help make your office building, transit system, workplace or retail store a safe and accessible environment. Visit **www.accesscontent.ca** for more details.

## Our Web Site

Our Web site can be found at **www.at-links.gc.ca/as**. At this site are all our old newsletters as well as different listings and links to other sites of interest. Should you be using these old newsletters, please bear in mind that the web addresses were correct when the newsletter was created but that they may not be accurate now. We do not plan to change the back issues of the newsletters.

## Communications from Us

If you would prefer to receive our newsletter on disk or by e-mail, please contact us at the address below.

## Where to Find Us

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